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ABSTRACT

Twenty-eight 4- and 5-year-old children were interviewed in the ninth and tenth days of the 1973 Israeli war to determine their factual knowledge about the war and their interpretation of the war. The factual questions focused on the children's knowledge of people, places, and objects most frequently reported in the news. Questions on the interpretation included "Who is winning?" and "When do you think the war will end?" The children's responses mirrored those of their families and the media. In general, the responses of the nursery school children were less accurate. Children were not able to philosophize about war, but responded in very personal terms. All children gave negative responses concerning the Arabs. It is suggested that adults should encourage children to ask questions and to express their fears. Earlier contact between young Israeli and Arab children may help allay fears and hostility between the two groups. (SBT)

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ISRAELI PRE-SCHOOL CHILDREN DURING WAR TIME STRESS: THEIR KNOWLEDGE AND INTERPRETATION OF THE 1973 WAR

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INTRODUCTION

"My mother said not to go to the park until the war is over." (October 19, 1973, a 4-year-old Israeli child)

Within one generation, from 1948 to 1973, Israel and her neighboring countries have been involved in four major wars. Voluminous amounts of material have been written about the 1973 war (and the other wars) in regard to strategies used, men killed, tanks lost and airplanes downed; little attention has been paid to the group that is perhaps most affected by the war---young children (Ziv, 1973).

Fifteen nursery (N) school children (age 4) and 13 kindgergarten (K) children (age 5) were interviewed on the ninth and tenth days of the 1973 war. The children interviewed were from two schools in the same middle class community in a large Israeli city. The children's involvement in the war consisted of seven air raid alerts over a period of a week. The signal for the alert was a loud piercing siren which lasted for approximately one minute. The children remained in the cement block shelters from five minutes to three hours. Other examples of the children's involvement were the military callup of fathers and brothers, mothers and other adults continuously listening to and watching the news, and a complete blackout after five o'clock in the evening. This city was not directly hit by attacks. The closest contact with the fighting was a downed Syrian plane 15 miles from this city. Reports of injuries

and fatalities were just beginning to reach the families at the time of the interviewing.

Two categories of questions were asked: a) the children's direct factual knowledge about the war, e.g., Who is Moshe Dayan? What is a Phantom? b) the children's interpretation of the war, e.g., Why do people fight wars? How do you feel when the siren rings?

CHILDREN'S FACTUAL INFORMATION ABOUT THE WAR

The factual questions asked focused on the children's knowledge of people, places and objects most frequently reported in the news. A primary objective for these questions was to evaluate the children's knowledge of their immediate environment around them in a time of crisis. I was also interested in the differences in the amount of information known by the nursery school children (N) and kindergarten children(K). These differences may suggest differing strategies for parents and teachers to use when explaining/listening/discussing the war situation (or other crisis type situations) with the two age groups.

A significant source of the children's factual knowledge was the news on radio and television. When asked to list the programs they watch on television, 46% of the kindergarten (K) children and 64% of the nursery (N) children listed the news. Similar responses were made from the questions about programs listened to on the radio; 54% of the K children and 50% of the

N children listened to the news.

Two government figures most frequently heard and seen on the news were Golda Meir (Prime Minister) and Moshe Dayan (Minister of Defense). The children were asked to identify these two leaders: "Who is Moshe Dayan?" "Who is Golda Meir?" Table 1 summarizes their responses to Dayan.

Table 1

Who is Moshe Dayan?

	Defense Minister	Most Important Minister	Prime Minister	Soldier in Palmach	He has Patch on his eye	Don't Know
K Children	14%	7%	7%	7%	42%	21%
N Children	0%	0%	0%	0%	38%	62%

Dayan's most important quality for both groups is his black patch. A pattern of contrasting responses between the K and N children can be seen in this question and tends to continue with most of the questions. The pattern for this question is that 35% of the K children identify Dayan by a function as compared to 0% of the N children. Table 2 presents the data from the question: "Who is Golda Meir?" The K children were much more aware than the N children of Meir's function (45% for K; 7% for N).

Table 2

Who is Golda Meir?

	Prime Minister	The most important Minister in the World	Asst. to Moshe Dayan	She is on TV	A Woman	Old and Nice	Moshe Dayan's Wife	She has long hair	Don't Know
K Children	38%	7%	7%	14%	7%	0%	7%	0%	20%
N Children	7%	0%	0%	13%	0%	7%	0%	7%	66%

Both Meir and Dayan have physical attributes which are easily identifiable by children. An interesting question, but not one asked of these children, is to identify the physical and personality traits liked/disliked in Dayan and Meir.

A question frequently asked by children during the war to one another and to adults on the streets when airplanes flew overhead was, "Are those our airplanes?" The K children had more knowledge than the N children in regard to airplane identification (See Table 3).

Table 3

What is a Phantom/Mirage?

	Can State What Phantom is	Cannot State What Phantom is	Can State What Mirage is	Cannot State What Mirage is
K Children	61%	39%	54%	46%
N Children	14%	86%	13%	87%

GEOGRAPHY AND DISTANCE CONCEPTS

Fathers or brothers of young children in the United States who have participated in wars have been located thousands of miles from their homes. Israeli children in contrast, have weekly visits from male relatives in the army during the 1973 war because of the close proximity of the fronts. In fact, the children in this study were able to see the highest peak in the Golan Heights from their city. Even with this close proximity, only one child (in the K group) was able to correctly describe where the Sinai and Golan Heights are located. Two of the possible reasons for the children's inability to locate the Sinai and Golan may be: a) the difficulty faced by young children in describing areas outside of their immediate environment; b) the emphasis made by the children's relatives that the fighting was far away from their city. Sixty-eight percent of the K children could state some attribute of the Sinai as compared to 27% of the N group. The older children also had more knowledge of some attribute of the Sinai; 45%K to 27% N. Examples of the geographic descriptions follow:

"The place where my daddy works."

"Where the war is."

"The Sinai is in the Golan."

"It's far. Don't go there because it's far."

"Far from my city."

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CHILDREN'S INTERPRETATION OF THE WAR SITUATION.

The realities of war reached the children in this study from numerous sources. As the children listened to and watched these sources they heard/saw many reports that contained numerous facts. This section focuses on the interpretations and conclusions made by the children from the factual reports.

A critical question was asked continually by young children to their friends and adults - "Who is winning?" We presented this question to the children in this study. Only one child (in N) stated that the "enemies" were winning. All other responses from both groups were stated in personal terms: "We," "My soldiers," "Our soldiers." The most personalized responses were made by 31% of the N children, "My father."

A second interpretation question was asked: "When do you think the war will end?" The variety of the responses mirrored the forecasts being made in the public media and in private among families and friends. (See Table 4)

Table 4

When Do You Think the War Will End?

	K Children	N Children
Tomorrow	25%	7%
Today	0%	7%
Few days	25%	7%
Ten Days	8%	0%
Few Weeks	0%	7%
One-half year	8%	0%
Very long	25%	0%

	K	N
Never	0%	7%
Will not end	0%	7%
When Police Come	0%	7%
When we beat Arabs	0%	7%
Don't Know	8%	44%

A major difference in the responses between the two groups was the larger number of N children who were unable to make a prediction about the length of the war (44% N, 8% K).

A stereotype made about Israelis is that they are very pragmatic. When asked the question - "Why do people fight wars?"- the children's responses were not in philosophical impersonal terms, but in very direct-personalized terms. This type of response is not surprising when one considers that the children answered this question while the war was still raging; all of the children related their responses to this war, not to the concept of war. The responses include:

"Syrians try to bomb us."

"Because the Arabs come."

"Because they don't like us and want to take the whole country."

"Because we have nice houses and they don't."

"Syrians come and want to attack my city."

"Arabs want the land."

"We don't want our houses to be bombed."

Both the K and N children had difficulty suggesting solutions for "How can people stop fighting wars?" Forty-two

percent of K and 40% of N had no suggestions. These children share behaviors with adults throughout the world who have little difficulty stating reasons for conflict situations, but have much difficulty in providing solutions to end and/or prevent conflicts. Perhaps the most workable solution was stated by a N child: "Get people away from one another." The most pessimistic solution came from a K child: "When everyone dies." Other suggestions for stopping wars include:

"Stop turning on the sirens." (air raid sirens)

"Police can stop wars."

"When everyone goes home."

"On the Sabbath people don't fight."

"When someone wins."

We tried to evaluate the Israeli children's attitudes toward Arabs by asking them if they would want to have Arab children in their kindergarten or nursery school. Since no attitude measure was taken prior to the war it is difficult to state if the war affected the children's attitude toward Arabs. All of the children in this sample stated that they would not want Arab children in their schools. The reasons were all stated in a form of strong negative affect. For example:

"They'll hit me."

"They'll fight with me."

"They're not nice."

"I don't like them."

"They'll kill me."

"Because they want to throw us into the sea."

RELATING WITH CHILDREN DURING A WAR SİTUATION

What can parents and teachers do with the questions and fears of children during a crisis situation similar to the 1973 war? A process that adults cannot use is to hide the situation As reported in this study, young children have much knowledge of what was happening during the war because of the large variety of media: television, radio, relatives, friends on the street and in school. Janis (1951) found that the variable that had the strongest effect on the child in a war situation was the emotional upset displayed by the adults around him and not the war situation itself. It is, of course, difficult for a mother and a grandmother to be calm when their close relatives are at the front. In addition, the mothers had the responsibility of taking care of the entire family themselves. A technique used by one mother and one that may be appropriate for the pre-school teacher, consisted of her sitting down with her young children and "reading" the pictures together in the daily newspaper. This open ended process allowed the children to get out all of their questions, fears and frustrations. The use of the newspaper pictures was superior to listening to the news together since the family could regulate the speed of the discussion rather than the news commentator.

One Israeli teacher designed a procedure for lessening the children's fear of being in an air raid shelter. She had the children decorate the shelter with pictures. The teacher also took the children to the shelter regularly each day so that they would become adjusted to the setting. While in the shelter, they tried to carry on with their daily routines.

We stated above that Israeli children in this study have strong negative views towards Arabs. These views are not congruent to the goals the Isareli government has for the 300,000 Israeli Arabs or for those Arabs who enter Israel from Jordan to visit and work in Israel. The Israeli Ministry of Education wants the Israeli Arabs to be loyal to Israel without negating their Arab aspirations (Y. Peres, 1970). If during stress situations Israeli Arabs feel the negative feelings stated by the N and K children, they will perhaps find it difficult within themselves to feel loyal to the State of Israel. The media (both Israeli and worldwide) tends to use the term "Arab" when describing Middle Eastern countries, without differentiating one country from the other. For example, Israel has a variety of relationships with "Arabs." Israeli Druse Arabs serve in the Israeli army; Israeli Christian and Moselm Arabs in universities increase in number each year; Israel and the Jordanian Arabs have traffic moving back and forth between the countries; Egyptian Arabs are negotiating with Israel directly for the first time in 25 years; Syrian Arabs and Israel have no direct contact with one another. The problem facing

parents and teachers is how to help young children realize that the "Arabs" are not a monolithic group. Perhaps this awareness is one step toward increased contact between Israeli Jews with Israeli Arabs. Osterweil reported (1972) that Israeli women in post high school studies tend to have a more positive attitude toward Arabs and are more willing to have contacts with Arabs if they have had a history of contacts with Arabs. If this contact begins with young children, it may lessen the generalized fear and dislike of Arabs reported by the children in this study.

SOME ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS

A primary objective of this study was to summarize Israeli children's information and interpretation of the 1973 Middle East War while the intense fighting was in process. Educators and parents may be interested in seeking answers to the following questions related to the situation following the hostilities:

1) How do young Israeli children's attitudes toward Arabs change after the cessation of the fighting?

2) How aware are young Israeli children of current events which are not directly related to the war?

3) What are appropriate processes for educators and parents to use with young children who continue to have fears which began with the war?

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